Overview of Achievements

The City Bar Justice Center (Justice Center) delivered a range of civil legal services this grant period benefiting 23,706 New Yorkers of low income, largely from NYC’s five boroughs. With our 31-FTE team leveraging thousands of pro bono hours from 1,850 attorney and law student volunteers, we helped clients obtain over $6.1 million in benefits and monetary awards including settlements, divest nearly $2.1 million in debt through bankruptcy and foreclosure prevention advocacy, and preserve nearly $80,000 in resources by, e.g., avoiding recoupments, garnishments, and other levies, or securing filing fee waivers. Our clients also benefited from over $13 million worth of legal services donated by pro bono partners. Also of note during this grant period:

- Our Legal Hotline responded to 10,568 phone and online inquiries; closed 10,116 cases including landlord-tenant, custody and child support, consumer debt, vital records correction, and employment matters; provided brief services (e.g., sending legal information, links, or referrals, and reviewing or drafting legal documents) to 1,638 patrons; and kept updated on changing laws and court policies.

- Our Legal Clinic for the Homeless co-authored #WiFi4Homeless: A Movement to Close the Digital Divide (Aug. 2021) – which followed on a path-breaking May 2020 report – and boosted a campaign resulting in WiFi being installed in 244 NYC shelters – crucial work narrowing the “digital divide.”

- Our Cancer Advocacy Project educated 166 cancer patients and survivors and 27 service providers via 13 virtual workshops on life planning, family law, medical debt/Medicare, and COVID scams.

Population Served: Under-resourced New Yorkers

Area Served: New York City Metropolitan Area

Total IOLA Grant: $537,500

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
- Total: 30.78
- Lawyers: 19.35
- Paralegal: 9
- Other Staff: 2.43
Overview of Achievements

- Our Immigrant Justice Project provided legal assistance to 216 people from 43 foreign countries, and submitted 136 applications for asylum, Violence against Women Act relief, and T and U visas.

- Our Consumer Bankruptcy Project trained 89 new volunteer lawyers to assist clients, provided brief services and advice to 95 individuals, and assisted another 41 individuals in filing for bankruptcy.

- Our Planning & Estates Law Project closed 237 cases, including assisting 23 pandemic-impacted families with Surrogate’s Court matters and 9 Mount Sinai patients with emergency documents.

- Our Neighborhood Entrepreneur Law Project matched 31 pandemic-disrupted small businesses with pro bono attorneys this grant period (after serving over 900 small businesses in the pandemic’s first year), and our Homeowner Stability Project (HSP) added a new staff attorney and further developed broader services needed by longtime homeowners of low income anchoring communities of color in NYC. Partnerships remain key, and in October 2021, HSP partnered with attorneys volunteering in their individual capacity who work for the New York Federal Reserve Bank to host an in-person estate planning clinic for LGBTQ homeowners who are seniors and/or living with a disability.

Direct Legal Services: Cases

Consumer / Finance:
The Justice Center’s Consumer Bankruptcy Project (CBP) employs a consumer/finance law advocacy model focused on providing a “fresh start” to New Yorkers of low income whose consumer debt not only impedes them from securing life’s essentials (housing, food, medicine, clothing), but also impacts their participation in the economy – and, often, overall capacity to engage in a healthy way with loved ones, coworkers, and their community.

Our advocacy for Mr. X, a Spanish-speaking newly divorced man with a child, was sued by a consumer creditor who sought to obtain a money judgment and an order garnishing Mr. X’s wages. Already leveraging extraordinarily modest income amidst New York’s rising cost of living, the prospect of wages garnishment would have pushed Mr. X further into poverty – and, frankly, despair. CBP assessed Mr. X’s situation, concluded he would qualify and benefit from filing for bankruptcy, and recruited two pro bono attorneys and a Spanish-speaking paralegal to serve as a translator to help Mr. X successfully obtain a discharge of $52,053 in consumer debt and prevent creditors from garnishing $375 a month from his hard-earned wages.
Direct Legal Services: Cases

**Immigration:**
The Justice Center’s Immigrant Justice Project (IJP) not only provides broad immigration law-based advocacy but often, by extension, assistance with significant family, health, and housing implications.

A case in point is the matter of Ms. A and her 11 year old son, who are from Honduras. Ms. A fled an abusive marriage that she was forced into at age 15. Although she began working with IJP to seek asylum in 2016, the New York immigration court rescheduled her trial three times between 2016 and 2022 – a protracted delay that is unfortunately emblematic of our current broken immigration system and that severely taxes the capacity of immigration providers, not to mention (and especially) our immigrant neighbors themselves. After years maintaining her case (including, e.g., by filing for multiple work permit re-authorizations) and providing moral support to Ms. A, the Justice Center and the pro bono attorneys we recruited to assist Ms. A finally were able to advocate on the merits of her claims at a remote hearing held in February 2022. Ms. A’s pro bono attorneys successfully demonstrated that Ms. A had suffered persecution in the form of domestic violence from which Honduras did not protect her – more specifically, on account of her membership in the particular social group of Honduran women unable to leave their marriages. They also compellingly argued that it would be dangerous for Ms. A to return to Honduras, both because the country’s government fails to protect women from domestic violence and because the client’s husband remains a threat to her. After the immigration judge granted Ms. A asylum, she declared, “This is the best day of my life.”

---

**23,706 people benefitted from 11,995 legal cases closed**

**Cases by Legal Problem Area**

- **Immigration**: 3%
- **Other**: 3%
- **Consumer / Fiance**: 10%
- **Employment**: 4%
- **Income Maintenance**: 6%
- **Housing**: 22%
- **Family**: 22%
- **Miscellaneous**: 30%
Other Services: Overview

The Justice Center provides community legal education, pro se assistance and outreach to thousands of New Yorkers of limited income and representing diverse communities through presentations, workshops, clinics, distribution of materials, and online resources. During this grant year, our staff and attorney volunteers provided 9,831 New Yorkers with legal information and/or advice via remote presentations and distributed materials, and assisted 601 people at pro se clinics addressing a range of topics (often also providing short, one-on-one follow-up consultations). In total, our provision of Other Legal Related Services was supported by 144 pro bono attorneys providing 957 volunteer hours. In addition, the Justice Center’s website and numerous online resources are accessed by tens of thousands of New Yorkers each year, and during this grant year these materials were viewed and/or downloaded 150,367 times.

| Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Community Legal Education          | 9,831                           |
| Pro Se Assistance                  | 601                             |
| Online Assistance                  | 150,367                         |
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

The Justice Center recognizes the vital role technology plays in efficiently delivering services to New Yorkers in need, and is increasing the use of technology across our work, from enhancing use of social media to publish educational materials, to developing more topical webinars and client-friendly videos. We have continued seeing increased use of our online intake portal (thus providing a 24/7 entry-point to our services), and processed 3,275 online intakes this grant period. We also continue to lead the collaborative NYC Consumer HelpFinder, an online intake tool that uses an intelligent case routing system to provide access to legal assistance from any web browser. And, organization-wide, we use LegalServer – a flexible cloud-based case management system – to track all client data, outreach, and pro bono user activity. Project-specific uses of technology include our Consumer Bankruptcy Project’s deployment of BestCase, a bankruptcy software that auto-populates data into completed bankruptcy petitions, and our Immigrant Justice Project’s shift toward providing all client data to pro bono partners via temporary Sharepoint folders with limited authorizations to increase confidentiality protections.

Other Services: Trainings

Internally, the Justice Center held a number of trainings to support staff during the grant period. Conducted by our own staff or by colleagues from other legal services organizations, internal staff-wide trainings included Trauma-Informed Lawyering; Strategies for Service Provider Wellness (Recognizing and Addressing Vicarious Trauma); Ethical Client Storytelling; Working with Individuals with Invisible Disabilities; and Embracing Plain Language. Our new (as of 2021) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee began overseeing “Word of the Day” mini-workshops during our twice-monthly staff meetings to explore the impact of language on our clients and work culture, and our Legal Hotline team continued its practice of remaining on top of emerging legal issues and changes in the law, with focused trainings this grant period including updates on employment law related to COVID-19, New York civil procedure law, and consumer law.

Justice Center staff also attended at least 83 external trainings this grant period. To cite two project-specific examples, our Immigrant Justice Project (IJP) attended the national Freedom Network Conference focused on human trafficking issues, including unique concerns pertaining to labor and sex trafficking. Participation in the national gathering deepened IJP’s connections with service providers across the country and helped its team members hone legal skills and strategies, share practice pointers, and generally work in alignment with advocates nationwide. And our Homeowner Stability Project staff attended multiple workshops and trainings related to the rollout of New York’s Homeowner Assistance Fund, designed to assist homeowners financially affected by the pandemic.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

In this grant period the Justice Center found it more difficult to recruit, train, and deploy the record number of pro bono volunteers that it did last year, finding a significant drop-off in pro bono activity especially among our law firm pro bono partners owing to firms’ extreme busyness this past year and (we assume) to volunteer fatigue a year-plus into the pandemic. Still, we maintained a roster of 1,660 pro bono attorneys who worked on 698 client matters; 144 attorneys also provided 957 hours of “other legal services.” A significantly increased metric this grant period over last year was in our recruiting and training of 30 law student volunteers (a 2/3 increase), who volunteered 5,274 hours in support of our work (well more than double the figure from the prior year). We integrated all volunteers into our increased number and range of remote client services, including relying on pro bono support to assist with Facebook Live and other platforms for webinars and other legal informational programming.

We also retained our traditional pro bono model: identifying appropriate opportunities across multiple projects; screening cases before assigning them, either as individual extended representation or clinic-based brief service matters; providing training (both as to relevant substantive law, and skills in client-centered lawyering with clients of low income) as well as staff support and mentoring throughout the duration of pro bono advocacy; and offering malpractice coverage for volunteers in need. Depending on experience level, volunteers conduct outreach and client intake, staff advice-only clinics, respond to Legal Hotline inquiries, advise on pro se matters, take on direct representation, or mentor other volunteers. We also offer “Day of Service” opportunities that combine training and service in one day.

Justice Center pro bono opportunities are open to law students, LLMs, and law graduates who need to meet their 50-hour pro bono requirement for bar admission, and we also participate in New York’s Pro Bono Scholars Program as well as the Attorney Emeritus Program. The Justice Center also advises law firms and corporate legal departments on setting up or enhancing their pro bono programs by providing model documents, training tips, and other guidance. Lastly, we hold an annual awards reception to celebrate the most outstanding volunteers in each of our various projects.

2,933 Attorneys volunteered 18,506.18 hours

30 Law Students volunteered 5,273.90 hours
Impact Cases

In this grant period the Justice Center’s Homeowner Stability Project (HSP) provided legal assistance to a group of Bronx homeowners involving a Department of Buildings (DOB) notice and demand to repair a failing retaining wall along their properties. The failed wall threatens other commercial and residential properties below the wall and will require an estimated $750,000-$1,500,000 or more in remediation work. If the DOB completes the work, it will result in significant liens on the individual homes and potential loss if the City eventually forecloses on those liens.

Though HSP’s advocacy – in collaboration with the Center for New York City Neighborhoods, a volunteer architect, and other community organizations – the Bronx homeowners obtained an initial grant of $10,000 for a geotechnical engineering firm to assess the scope of the project and create a remediation plan. The firm has concluded its services and the homeowners and advocates are now seeking additional funding to begin work on the project.

Significant Collaborations

All Justice Center staff collaborate with the broader public interest legal community as well as the law firms, corporate legal departments, and members among the private bar who comprise our pro bono partner network; and many of our staff sit on NYC Bar Association or other subject matter-related committees or partnerships, and/or collaborate with the judiciary, law schools, and government to increase access to justice. Here are a few examples of significant collaborations:

Our Legal Hotline collaborates with OCA’s Access to Justice Program through an NYC Civil Court Project, which deploys pro bono volunteers supervised by our staff to provide legal advice, information, and brief services to patrons of the Civil Court Help Centers in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Prior to the pandemic, the project’s volunteers and our supervising staff assisted Civil Court patrons in person at the court’s Help Centers. After the project went on hiatus during earlier stages of the pandemic, we began operating it remotely after developing a new protocol with our partners at the court by which we handle online inquiries from the public via an online portal on the Court’s website.

To address the “digital divide” and in particular its impact on New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, our Legal Clinic for the Homeless has collaborated on an awareness and advocacy campaign with the New York City Bar Association and the Legal Aid Society (which brought a lawsuit against the City), resulting in the installation of WiFi in 244 shelters in NYC and the introduction of legislation aimed at securing internet access in shelters throughout New York State.
Significant Collaborations

Several of our projects also collaborate with a range of community partners to provide legal education, holistic advocacy services, and law reform:

- Our Planning and Estates Law Project continues to collaborate with Mount Sinai Hospitals’ Medical Partnership, and provides Mount Sinai patients with emergency life planning legal assistance.

- Our Neighborhood Entrepreneur Law Project continues to collaborate with a series of community partners for remote legal clinics and presentations, including small business development centers, business solution centers, public libraries and economic development corporations.

- Our Consumer Bankruptcy Project coordinates with Legal Services NYC to operate the pro bono panel for the Eastern District and the Southern District of New York Bankruptcy Courts.

- The Justice Center is a member of the New York Legal Services Coalition, the New York Immigration Coalition, MIE (Management Innovation Excellence for Legal Aid), and the Public Interest Pro Bono Association, and participates in the New York State Tech Committee Conference. We also participate in the NYC Consumer Help Finder, which assists individuals with consumer issues such as debt collection, frozen bank accounts, applying for bankruptcy, or other consumer-related issues through an online application that then routes users to the services of five NYC legal services providers, including the Justice Center.

Sources of Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IOLA Grant</td>
<td>$537,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City and County Funding</td>
<td>$127,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Funding</td>
<td>$952,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Funding</td>
<td>$407,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>$2,162,582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$4,187,246</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>